The Surprising Death of the Public Intellectual:

A Manifesto for Restoration

cc Jo Guldi, 2008

These days few professors of the humanities grace our newspapers on public questions. Consider the issue of sexuality. One is more likely to hear from an economist like Paul Krugman, who condemns on the basis of his flat-earth theory the injustice done a Pakistani victim of rape, or an evolutionary biologist like Randolph Nesse, who employs our hunter-gatherer ancestors to explain the courtship rituals of the American bar scene. A reading of how young women feel about nudity differently from their grandmothers, constructed from the novels of Nathanael West? An editorial about the unintended consequences of American feminism by generation, race, and class, as conjectured by a historian? Both are unusual in the extreme.

Public scholars of the humanities have become a rarer and rarer species. The last great demonstrations appeared in the late 1970s and 80s, when sociologists like Richard Sennett and Benedict Anderson took on the themes of public interaction and nationalism. Intellectuals with an explicitly public stake in discourse flourished in the recent present, when they ranged from intellectuals who favored direct intervention, like William Sloane Coffin, the Yale University chaplain who organized busloads of freedom riders headed south in 1961, like novelist John Hersey's championing of anti-nuclear proliferation in the pages of the New Yorker. There were indirect public intellectuals, too, like Hannah Arendt's excavation of types of public interaction and sociability from ancient Greece to the present day, delivered as lectures around the

nation, or Irving Howe's literary essays on topics like Ralph Ellison and the contemporary color line, published in *The Nation*, *The New Republic,* or the journal he founded, *Dissent*. Indeed, intellectuals of the 1950s sought out a public arena in which to engage questions of justice and to define notions like democracy. Their work in dissemination and public argument, as much as their intellectual work, underwrote the self-understanding of a generation of activists.

The issue here is the loss, for the public, of a certain kind of memory: the memory of cultural, social, and political history of human timescales, the memory that not so long ago things worked differently, and that the present may have looked very different itself. Experts like Krugman and Nesse are, by definition and training, not participants in the humanities game of memory, comparison and synthesis: rather, they are experts. Experts, like the fox of Isaiah Berlin, track down the single series of facts towards knowledge. They come out of laboratories, where they have performed minute studies of a single experiment where terms like "promiscuous" and "chaste" are fixed as a supposition of the game. Experts judge the workings of the brain by the newest findings, not by comparison with Aristotle or Machiavelli. Hedgehog intellectuals, by contrast, agglomerate and compare: this definition of good behavior with those five more relative or strict versions that societies have enforced at different times; the perspective of gender studies with that of sociology. Their training in the humanities acquaints them with thinkers classical and modern; it teaches the keen eye for other cultures, the rapid absorption of information about pamphlet and canvases in everyday time. Hedgehogs generally are made not in laboratories but in libraries, where they have learned to compare dictators and democracies across time and space, dealing with the primary texts of alien societies – learning, that is, from the natives on their own terms. Hedgehogs are assimilators, and they're friendly with the locals. Lately they do not come out of the libraries so much, and the forum is brimming with foxes.

The disappearance of the humanities from the public signals the evacuation of historical perspective from the age of expert rule. It is a sorrowful trend. Intelligent persons, who value both foxes and hedgehogs, will want to know *why*. They will, it is hoped, also mourn

the passing of the public intellectual, inquire as to the conditions of his return, and demand related changes of themselves.

The bewildering extinction of public hedgehogs reflects the empoisoned convergence of three major forces that conspired to permanently distort American intellectual culture. First, the advent of continental philosophy and the aestheticization of obscurantism. Second, the transformation of the academic profession as a whole. Third, electronic publication and the coming of the internet. Each of these forces represented the refining of the process of knowledge-creation. At their inception, they were beacons of hope, and they inspired young thinkers to argue seriously over matters of potentially public concern. Together, they conspired to break the public inclinations of the humanities as a whole.

The first loss of the public was not a defeat but an allergic reaction. French theory came of age in America as Foucault taught at Berkeley, Derrida visited Irvine, the translations of the major theorists only a matter of the late seventies and early ages. They shook the American mind, and they enthusiastically received, but only partially digested – a handful of texts accepted as gospel, the larger debates behind them mostly unknown. All of postmodernism might be taught still in a single week in most graduate courses, or a single chapter of *Of Grammatology* serve to represent the whole complicated and often contradictory turns in the philosopher's entire corpus. The result of rushed learning was the confusion of tongues by many of the movement's chief proponents, who spoke of Oedipus and the Panopticon as the only models for power, lyricizing through run-ons that mimicked Derrida's grammar without his passion.

At stake as well was the politics of the radical left that became free to operate in the academy after the McCarthy Era. Marxists who had seen their mentors suicide after public disgrace had little patience for tempering their politics, language, or disdain for the middlebrow: a fetishization of removal that expressed itself in thick allusions to Marx, Trotsky, Gramsci, and the heavy jargon of post-colonial critiques. Expressed as a style of writing, half-absorbed philosophy and bitter political divides appeared as an unfathomable traffic jam of continentalisms. Hyphens, dashes, three-way puns, colons, and

parentheses became the badge of the intellectual so liberated to have escaped the confines of vernacular thinking altogether.

In theory the *avant-garde* would pioneer new modes of thought that would be absorbed a few generations later by the slower, befuddled masses. The Russian modernists first who propounded this theory prophesied that the working class would soon be whistling Schoenberg in the streets. Avant-garde rhetoric was turned to a new use in America. The dashes, puns, and terms like "phallocracy" that entered academic vogue in the 1980s signaled a revolution not in politics but against the public itself. Postmodernists invented a language incomprehensible even to their colleagues. They were mocked by the Sokol prank and rightly rejected as unfathomable jargon from the pages of all forms of media that still looked to a public – with its vernacular language and limited knowledge of rarified canons – as a final readership deserving of attention. They had aimed at liberation and succeeded in elitism, and they lost the public in the process.

A second loss of the public happened in the shift of battleground from the public publication to the shadowlands of academic journals. The phrase "publish or perish" appeared in the 1970s in the wake of increased job-finding pressure on academics in the humanities and social sciences, alongside new metrics for the quantitative comparison of individual scholarship as a function of publication, citation, and institution. "Publish or perish" operated, at least in the social sciences, by setting into play a series of metrics that established quantitative *citation*, rather than qualitative relevance, as the primary marker of importance. The expansion of journals to accommodate the need for academics to publish, and the expansion of mechanisms for measuring and comparing the importance of various academic journals, has accompanied the streamlining of publishing by academics into a n increasing number of academic publications. The SSCI (Social Science Citation Index) appeared in 1973 and provided the basis for rankings of publications by citation counts – the number of citations that linked to a particular publication. America's Best Colleges Rankings on US News and World Report began to be published in 1983, and it too compiled statistics on publications, broken by department and university. As quantitative citation became the measure of success, minority professional publications that did the citing were prioritized over

mainstream, public journals. The academic's relevance was defined in terms of his footnoting colleagues, not in terms of an unknown public of *New Yorker* readers. Through an insistence on the metrics of the superscript, "publish or perish" effectively eliminated appeal to the public as an item of academic concern.

Finally, "publish or perish" hastened the specialization of knowledge and fragmentation of audiences further through the diversification of publications. To take one example, the emergent study of disability, which attracted scholars of injustice, biology, education, and the construction of disease since the late 1970s. A handful of journals published by outfits like the Council for Exceptional Children formed the concrete expression of expanding knowledge about the behavior of autistic and otherwise disabled individuals. The field underwent a dramatic boom in publication venues with the coming of electronic media. In 1996 alone appeared three new publications: *The Journal of intellectual & developmental disability*, *The Journal of applied research in intellectual disabilities*, and *Focus on autism and other developmental disabilities*. As of 2007, the field of disability studies boasted at least 50 separate periodicals.

The proliferation of abstruse publications was hastened by one last new trend, electronic publication. Expensive institutional subscriptions funded by university libraries still float the expensive print journals, with little if any profit going to staff and publisher. They were labors of constant cost-cutting. Online publication drove down the cost of publishing, encouraging new journals to spread like the wildfires of Los Angeles. In 1994 the four-year-old *Postmodern Culture* went electronic, the first peer-reviewed publication to do so. In 1996, *First Monday,* the child of radical information scientist Edward Valauskas, was launched as an *exclusively* internet publication. More than half the existent journals on disability arose after 1996, and almost all of these were exclusively published as online journals.

Ironically, electronic publication was initially expected to reinstate the public venue for academics, rather than to abstract journals further from the public realm. The pioneers of electronic journals like *First Monday* saw electronic publication as an opportunity to liberate discourse from academic constraints, and so reach a broader public.

This trend remained particularly true for publications on the study of technology, where an ideologues looked to the internet as a new commons. Yet freedom and publicity were not the trend. Electronic publication soon became another cash cow for the great university presses, which sold packages around the electronic subscription to traditional disciplinary landmarks like *Past and Present.* Charging for the electronic version of the publishers' great mainstays established a precedent for charging for the new ranks of *exclusively* electronic journals as well, grounding visions of an internet commons. Electronic journals became the private demesne of university publishers who reap between $4 and $200 an article that costs them nothing to buy or to publish. Taylor & Francis, a British publisher, charges between $131 and $2973 for the electronic subscription to a year of quarterlies and monthlies (an individual print subscription is a bargain in comparison, at rates between $42 and $911). Imagine the parent of the disabled child reading across a range of years and journals. The journals and their publishers are not intended highwaymen, of course; they prohibit access knowing that the articles are written by academics, for academics; that university libraries subsidize the fees of their only readers, and that the public cares not a fig for what academic journals have to say in the first place.

The academic journal had already reduced the much publication in the humanities to grist for the citation mill, grist that existed to pad the careers of academics who formally served no purpose other than the production of more such fodder for the same mill, which churns the labor of uncounted thousands into yet more material that will be cited purely so that more articles can be cited. In undergraduate lectures, among colleagues, concerned academics everywhere speak to and believe in a public, to be sure. But where a man's ink is, his heart lies also. With fewer and fewer exceptions, academic ink feeds private paper mills never destined for the public eye.

Together, obscurantism, publish-or-perish, and electronic publication produced an ironic situation: the proliferation of publication coupled with the narrowing of readership. A true market of ideas tends to demonstrate growth in both sectors. Unread publications suggest academic stagflation. In other words, the humanities in America have lost their public.

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Imagine two possible futures: a future of academics as academics, experts enshrined in libraries, arguing amongst themselves, directing the progress of knowledge through a series of well-honed essays and monographs, while public culture proceeds to digest the sea of information into an amateur, enthusiastic mythology of truth. Wikipedia articles in this scenario will continue to resemble their current pastiche of fact and spurious conclusion, rambling detailed explanation and spurious, old-fashioned proclamation of the great good of progress / success of the nation / triumph of the free market / triumph of communism. The opinions of the public will be fought out in a real estate war on Wikipedia, with academic debate rarely if ever offering an alternative view or playing the moderator.

In another scenario, the public intellectual returns. She seeks out new ways to enter the public discourse. She refuses to be confined by the format of academic journals, monographs, and NPR interviews. She has memories of past societies, and visions of future societies that threaten to evolve. She is an active translator in the culture wars, an active participant in the process of social change, and an active member of a public, where experts engage, without jargon, a world of common sense, diverse experience, and deep prejudice. Humanities departments across the nation would welcome such individuals as paragons of civic responsibility and transdisciplinary excellence. They would adopt new rubrics for rewarding intellectual activity in the public sphere out of preference to journal citation. Recognized, rewarded, a thriving public culture would transform world politics on a grand scale. Plentiful opportunity for intellectual engagement with widely available archives would characterize public culture, and participatory politics would flourish in an environment of engagement and criticism.

The construction of the future is in the hands of those who choose it. Individuals who admired such a public culture would therefore pursue the activities most likely to bring about an alternative to academia in its contemporary situation.

Manifesto for a Public Intellectual.

1 – Engaging the world as a public intellectual requires a different location of engagement with the world than does being an academic.

Academic journals don't go to the public. Editorials and online magazines do. The internet has made possible a re-opening of the arcane worlds of study to the general public. The internet outdates the obscure connections between the old-fashioned intellectual and antique book dealers, printers, collectors of cameras. It throws these all into the open: now Ebay and internet transactions instead of cramped notes written to bookdealers across continental Europe. The internet opens the library to the world. The internet obviates most of the traditional functions of the library, university, and seminary. It puts the tools of intellectual critique into the hands of the masses. It puts the most refined and learned of discourse into the open air. It gives every alienated suburban teenager access to enough information to stump their teacher – not only information about history, such as I had access to from the public library twenty years ago as a fidgety third-grader, but also contemporary information: the news of all countries, reviews of the most recent philosophy and science, digested, for the willing, from every point of view radical and conservative, broken down for the beginner or the expert. The virtual coffeehouse of the internet makes possible so much that was only fantasy before.

The internet also makes possible new means of sharing and publishing research that potentially can cross-fertilize both intellectuals and the public. Most examples of good research can be better documented by notes in blogs and wikis. The case of attribution remains valid; online writers can accurately point to what they've done, even in the minutia of research synthesized in someone else's argument. Only a truly radical reconceptualization of nation-building or social-formation needs to be published as a monograph. The internet makes possible the lighter circulation of arguments of lighter weight. The masses of facts that fill in and illustrate dominant paradigms can be more effectually used, more digestible, in the form of wikis. Flights of finesse, demonstrations of proficiency with critical language and theory – these exercises that

graduate students are called upon to make – are rarely actually interventions in the idea of "discipline" or "public" itself. As such they belong to the private world of a blog, a personal documentation of one's intellectual journey through a set of ideas, which shines when it is worthy and looks dull when it isn't. Becoming a public intellectual will therefore require a rethinking of the modes of gathering and sharing research.

Real hope exists in the public, intellectual culture of the internet. A minority of publications have harnessed the openness of the internet to proliferate new, open discussions, free of access, broadly interdisciplinary, in which most of the most innovative thinkers are constantly debating public issues of the day. So *Borderlands*, an Australian "transdisciplinary" journal, which since 2002 has ruthlessly produced a series of interpolations on biotechnology, Sharon's wall, Rene Girard, the papacy and the War in Iraq. The monthly public "Outburst" of the Journal of Mundane Behavior has critiqued cell phone behavior, password usage online, and interaction on the public bus. The fascinating *Rejecta Mathematica* specialized in *only* articles that have been rejected from other mathematical journals, featuring sections on "controversial premises" and "misunderstood genius."

On the margin too are those vague, non-peer reviewed citadels of interdisciplinary excellence like *Cabinet,* where catalogues of recent art installations sit side-by-side histories of the timeline prepared by remarkable young academics, the most eclectic, best curated, and aesthetically radical of the current heirs of 'zine culture whose numbers also include *N+1, McSweeney's, The Baffler,* and *The Believer*. The Dutch anthology *Documente 12* specializes in aggregating online the best articles on modern life from around the world into a footlocker of curiosities in French, Spanish, English, and German. And then there are the old standbys, which never want for senior academics of great perspicacity: *Harper's*, *Le Monde diplomatique*, and *Raritan.* Both the free journals and the liberated magazines exist for an underworld of hungry readers who share news of their reading over the stray coffee; they form a liminal world that cuts against the prevailing trend, the preserve of the public and the intellectual commons, exiled to the margins.

Writing for such venues as a critic and arbiter is only one possible role for the public exercise of ideas. The public intellectual may manifest as an activist, documenting an avant-garde of practitioners and providing certain tools to enhance their sense of identity and coherence. In any case, the work of the public intellectual takes place by appearing and engaging the public at coffee-shops, newspapers, websites, public meetings, think tanks, policy centers, boards of government, and public high schools where the academic is but rarely seen. The location of intellectual engagement is always more public than its academic equivalent.

2 - Engaging the world as a public intellectual demands broader kinds of research than those pursued by academics.

The public is not held in books; it is *out there* in the wild. In search of that public, an intellectual has to leave the library and enter the forum. She becomes a species of spy, collecting information from everyday life, the numerous traces of intersecting cultures. She learns their languages. She gains their trust. She secretly analyzes them late into the night, mapping their movements on a geopolitical scale. She is capable of interviewing people, even sports-obsessed sales agents and tartan-wearing fraternity brothers. She is a good traveler.

Her ethnology requires an immersion in the many cultures of contemporary politics before she takes a stance. The public intellectual is eager to understand and explain the situation of women, blacks, gays, lesbians, queers, geeks, fundamentalists, bubbas, mountain men, libertarians, Israelis, Palestinians, Copts, Argentinians, anarcho-syndicalists, and any other subgroup with an interesting and optimistic point of view whose interest may have been overlooked by the forward movement of world powers. The public intellectual is at least curious about UFO-sightings and takes a conciliatory attitude towards hipsters. She validates the conspiracy theory as an upwelling of mass resentment against the culture of experts that isolates the power of insight within a small cadre and invalidates local opinion and insight among individuals everywhere. She gets giddy whenever she meets obsessive collectors, garages full of found footage, office managers who collect rare nineteenth-century postcards off of Ebay in their spare time. She is hip with the cult of the dilettante. She aims to become a connoisseur of

dilettantism. Big-hearted to the last, she sees in this the reflection of the most noble sentiments of democracy, where other people with advanced degrees see either the pallor of tastelessness or fear the invasion of their turf.

One way to get there is to give up on the old-fashioned models of textual research, the subdivision of knowledge, and follow the path of landscape history: the revelation of secret knowledge about the interpretation of things hidden in plain sight. J. B. Jackson at some point, anyone who turned to studying the American love of the Airstream trailer and motorcycle as a better key to collective unconscious than William Carlos Williams or Andy Warhol. The landscape was, is, will be filled with information about how we behave, and the study of landscape escapes all the classical bullshit of literary studies and nation-based history, to be ultimately concerned with what people are doing on a micro, medium, national, and global scale. It blends a rapacious interest in the vernacular with a deep respect for the lineage of folkways and products of symbolic consumption. It might tell more about what people are actually doing to find pleasure, identity, community, and life than any other single discipline.

There are real heroes who have shown the way here. Architectural historians writing field guides to the suburbs. Studies of infrastructure, drossscape, walking. Things you can tell about a black neighborhood by the fact it doesn't have any grocery stores.

Discernment, not enlightenment, is the province of the public intellectual; enlightenment is for monks and other contemplatives who want to be isolated with their books, to be let alone with heaven and eternity. For all those who care about time, history, and interpretation, there is only the vast unfolding and becoming of a world whose mind cannot be made up.

3 – The reason for caring about the public is the issue of social change.

Social change has to operate through the structures of dissemination, therefore through the media, through celebrity culture, and through politics.

The public intellectual is aware of the flux of history and favors intellectual work within history rather than the building of knowledge for knowledge's sake. She is constantly on the lookout for separating tectonic plates, the eruption of magma, the shift in the wind, the freezing over of continents, the implosion in the free market, the nuclear winter, and the devolution of the social fabric into fighting in the streets which may herald an entirely new age. The public intellectual would be ashamed to make naïve conservative arguments like "modern democracies have always embraced these values and therefore they will never chance," or "the stability of the current regime presages," having in his pocket a host of counterexamples of radical shifts in perspective, including the earthquake in Lisbon, the sack of Rome, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the striking of his own uncle by lightening, the successes of Maoist China, and diverse other anecdotes that illustrate the unpredictability of nature and the reality of historical change.

The public intellectual fights for life against death. The culture of death is all around one: in the punitive tendencies of state, law, and school; in the cult of those fixated on reciting the lessons of the past as if they were still pleasing their sixth-grade teachers; in the weak and repetitive politics of pundits. The public intellectual is on the side of life: curious about teenagers, curious about outsider artists, curious about undiscovered cultures, not fully integrated intellectual positions – anything, in short, which can promote vitality, conversation, argument, and proliferation. In politics, the culture of death stresses sacrificing culture on the altar of economic growth, bowing to the current ideas in circulation, and a preference for old forms. The public intellectual presses the suit of justice and mercy; everywhere, in many forms, the cause of life.

The modern intellectual may have the opportunity to become an academic rockstar, and in that case, she must use her power for good. She may not, and then she must persist, doing the more complicated, and also more radical work of the trenches, burrowing trap-doors, escape hatches, and mole-tunnels underground to connect all the basements, libraries, and prisons of the world.

4 – The public intellectual creates social action by perfecting the tools of academic study.

The spread of information, whether pursued by intellectuals or experts, is always in the service of humanity. It expands the bounds of public participation in the production of knowledge across class and race. It creates official bodies of information for policy decisions based in an informed and deep perspective on life.

For tools of outreach the public intellectual forcibly looks back to the oldest and most conservative of the humanities, Telling History. A History, as distinguished from stories more broadly, is a particularly persuasive arguments about events, and as such makes claims about the identity of a common experience, playing off of names and images *still in public memory*. It does not excavate obscure schools of fringe politics for new kinds of jargon to throw about, although it may find occasional heroes and patterns there. It is more modest, and more scientific as a set of claims, that other myths about who we *are*, for our collective experience can be known, identified, argued about. Artifacts from it can be shown in public, held up. People have memories that they bring to bear. The eventness of pasts is undeniable – the fact of world war two and the holocaust – even if the meaning of them is in constant dispute. History, unlike other disciplines, tries to tell persuasive stories. It situates itself in the facts that are knowable, in a mastery of what can be amassed, the stories that can be told. And it chooses not to analyze them with the tweezers of the philosopher or psychologist, but rather with to slice through a dozen contrary versions, and to remass them with all the magic of the sorcerer bringing a doll to life. The historian tells stories, persuasive stories, stories that can be rehearsed and lipsynched by news anchors and political pundits as pure fact: fact that we know that evil was done, fact that we know that our society has changed. They will proliferate as fact and myth and hearsay down to all the peoples of the world. Telling persuasive stories is an important component of social change.

The modern intellectual will be forced to search out and invent new avenues for the perfection of craft through collaboration. She may proceed by reaching out across disciplines, offering conferences, salons, coffeehouses, and looking for venues to start a larger engagement. The

most fruitful avenue indeed may be the pooling of research and projects online: using social news sharing services like http://www.digg.com, photo sharing sites like Flickr, and social bookmark servers like http://del.icio.us/ to establish larger communities of active intellectuals who share information on their current work. These communities would have the advantage over academic communities of providing rich content pulled from the archives *in addition* to fully-produced publications ready for discussion. Private wikis and mailing lists would enable such independent intellectuals to mentor and refine each others' work much like an academic community.

Such alternative communities of intellectual engagement are becoming radically important for the public intellectual to survive, for the crisis of the public intellectual is a crisis for the humanities in general.

5 – The success or failure of the public intellectual is important to the survival of the humanities as a whole.

The fact that the academy is an unwelcoming home for the public intellectual is a problem insofar as the humanities have to justify their existence to the world. The humanities are having a hard time explaining themselves to the public, and the result of that is a looming crisis in the funding of the humanities.

For the humanities are so distant from the public that they can scarcely articulate the reasons they exist. Our universities were built upon an understanding of *all* humanities inquiry as *fundamentally* about public intellectualism: the humanities were the study of human values, and engaging them implied ministry to one's students and the broader public. Those ideas have faded with the secularization of elites. They have left a broad wake in what the humanities are *for*. Indeed, it's a glum moment for the humanities' self-understanding as being *for anything*. One of the last humanities intellectuals to write for the public, Stanley Fish, recently refused to justify the humanities to the public for a variety of reasons that might be summed up as "the importance of wonder" or "the importance of maintaining a free zone for individuals dedicated to the experience of fascination and problem-solving." Fish continues here his life-long defense of the *private intellectual* who refashions his own values, and he sees these values at work in great

literature and great scholarship alike. Such an idea is valuable in a world where scholars were once forced to recite the doctrines of church and state. But it dodges entirely the current imbalance between a *superabundance* of private scholarship beholden not to nations but to disciplines and journals, and the lack of public intellectuals free to speak to the nation. Generations of postmodern scholars have not produced a coffee-house institution that defends free scholarship in the pursuit of pleasure, but rather a paper mill of tiny journals, handcuffing graduate students and assistant professors to the mechanisms of professionalization. It's not a prison, but it's neither so free nor so pleasurable as one would hope of an institution that celebrates itself for its uselessness.

That collapse is ripe to press the crisis of humanities funding to the breaking point. When so great a man as Fish will do so little to justify fading humanities funding, the public starts doing the math. Mark Liberman, a professor of linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania, coolly calculates that if Fish's unwillingness to explain is typical, humanities departments of the future can expect "roughly one tenth" of their current funding. We live in a society where ideas have consequences, and if the humanities is stripped of ideas to offer the public, the humanities will simply disappear.

6 – The success of the public humanities is essential to the flourishing of political culture as a whole.

Public man has been dying alongside the public intellectual. The middle class fails to vote and forms its identity through consumption rather than by active participation in civic affairs.

Yet public space is alive and well, its avenues open: the internet offers multiple opportunities for the curious or bored to find out information from any who offer it; it reduces the expense of publication to almost nil, and so provides the possibility of a new republic of letters.

That public space may be filled up with noisy entertainment and uninformed opinion, but an alternative is possible. Critical thinkers rise to the highest level of debate when the issues are published in a vernacular language and accessible fashion. The public intellectual, who

contributes a historical perspective on the strategies of many humans across many eras, represents the great hope for the return of critical civic engagement in our time.